MEADOWS SPEAK

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Epiphany, I Think

Fragmented souls colliding and ricocheting off of each other's pain is how it felt to meet, love, fight, fuck, and leave the couple dozen or so names I found and lost in a college town in the mountains where I "found" myself and "lost" myself more times than I can count and left with only one scar, in the palm of my hand, to remind me that Bud Bombers and cute girls in combat boots and sundresses will always be my weakness. But my real weakness was how I refused to leave my head and speak aloud that, maybe I wanted…well, anything.

All my passionate desires felt like self-immolation with the whiskey bought for me by future ghosts keeping those desires fed and eating away at my insides. We would race to see who could ruin themselves first every night in-between lifting everyone but ourselves up, as we wrote love letters in broken sentences in every single hue of the moon.

My head would ache with the lack of sense to it all, so instead I would dream that the mountains would rise up on ancient limbs and tear open my chest and fill it with the vast expanse of the sky, and maybe with all that beauty inside of me, maybe then I could describe her eyes, or care for the hearts beating beside me on the couch or hold on to his hand a little longer or forgive such simple fuck-ups.

Instead, I continued to wake without aim, without the guts to be aimless. I cherished from a distance and swallowed the bitter hatred for myself in a silence I built up from the roots to the rafters lingering an extra eight or nine months longer, returning finally to finish up the original campaign, after way too many soul-crushing side quests.

From it all, I've come to know that names sometimes fade and certain memories like to stick like tar to the brain but it all continues to feed the bonfire in my chest that I plan to keep burning.

I Hate Dragonflies
(published originally with Bending Genres)

The summer is dying in my arms
While the pages shred themselves
Mirth simmers in humid air
Dread winds like ribbons ‘round my fingers
Gasoline fumes and ashtrays litter my head
All while the devil and his saints are spinning thread in the pantry
Whistling cemetery lullabies that have echoed ‘round my skull since playground days

Moths beat themselves against the bare bulbs of this porch like my heart against this broken ribcage
That holds spells I dare not utter
Curses against my own hands
To plunge into the calling void

I’ll gather the dead leaves and wrap them ‘round my longings
Litter your windowsill with the tired eyes and thin skin of
The specter of a small-town shaman
Mixing rain chants with desperate pleas
To the mountains to forgive me
As tea leaves spell out cracks in the autumn sky

The High Falls Cabaret

Lost Souls pirouette through the kitchen of broken glass
Where candles
flicker and
shimmer
In the cuts on our faces
Ancient hieroglyphs summoning better days

Voices spring from the dirt below the floorboards
Howling theses on lust written in slurred words
pouring out onto a dusk-lit porch
And lilies sprout from the cupboards
while daisies wilt in the cracks in the foundation

Stars rain down onto the rooftop,
Weighing down the rafters into the bedrooms, rarely slept in but filled to the ceilings with dreams
Of comets and ash and glitter pasted to skin until dying days

Rats hum lullabies
to the sleeping roaches as they burrow between the floors
waking in the early hours to usher on
termites to work
turning the whole thing to decay

Cement and pebbles litter the weeds of the driveway
home to more stomach acid than exhaust fumes
and more cigarette butts than rubber
as whole evenings are lost to the hot summer air

And further inside, swimming in lace up to the neck
dust weighing down the eyelids of a dozen strange faces,
the soles of their feet bleed into the rug
as they stitch their sleeves together
so they can hold hands forever and repeat in harmony

“You are us and everything.”

Ellenville

You would overtake my radio
Plucked acoustic strings
Ringing in our ears
We'd roll the windows down
The wind whipping your hair
And disappear for a few hours
Dipping in and out of towns whose names I never bothered to learn
Rolling hills that cascade off into the unknown
Windswept, our voices were lost up there, away from our bustling little town
We could speak freely of all the names that passed through our microcosm of a world of chaos
Sharing the pain etched deep inside our bodies
Knowing that maybe if another knew
Then maybe we could survive it
Maybe even overcome it
And that by leaving those names in the dust of my car in some forgotten godforsaken town
The aching would stay behind to wander in abandoned homes or
Tangled in the roots of some tree
As we fade into the sunset
The horizon ever our destination
Hidden behind the small giants growing out of the jagged land
I used to miss the sea
But now I miss the mountains and pay no mind to the sea

Noshi's Closing Thoughts

Box scrapes the grease off the grill while I finish up the last of the dish-ware from the night's events.

"What's the weirdest thing you've thought about throwing in the fryer?" I ask.

"What do you mean?"

"Like, a dead rat, your molars, your lease, a hand grenade, whatever"

I hear Box's cackle mix with the sizzling of the grill and it bothers me.

I turn off the sink, turn to him, and stare him dead in the eyes.

"I'm serious, at the most bored or most stressed moment, what did you think of throwing into the fryer?"

A pause as Choking Victim and the grill are the only sounds probably all over this tiny town at 4 am.

"My head."

"Same."

And we get back to closing in silence.

Long Live Exit 17

I am thankful the only you I ever knew was the sober-ish you, the you not shooting up at your band's name but the you getting high on my couch writing your fucked up poetry that I still sing along to, the you that was trying to save his life in the only fucked up way he could, with songs and booze and weed and still telling cops to fuck off with court dates pending and relationships failing and unending dialoguing as if you stopped speaking the addiction would catch back up to you, the only you I ever knew and still imagine is the true you.

s*n

I wanted to beat you senseless
And wrap you in my arms
And plead with the universe that you'd find peace
Instead, I ran back home,
Forgot your name
Until it showed up with two dates on Facebook,
And I cursed you for the red hair dye on the wall,
Draining our security deposit
And my missing Minor Threat LP
And the fact that I'd never get to see your third act.

Time Lies to Me and U2

Eternity etched across your face
lips cracking like the paint in Pripyat
your fingers
gnarled like the knotted root
of the tree in my mother's backyard
shallow
breaths
and
incomprehension
words no longer spill out from your throat
your body just barely hanging on to the present
for us
here with you,
clinging to you,
as your nephew
lifts his nephew onto his shoulders
filling the halls with giggles,
the floral wallpaper bursting to life in the hospice
next to the hospital where I was born

Everything but the Wild Roses

Two weeks after your death
My life started to fall to pieces
The petals wilting from the primroses
growing from your sunburnt lips

And the flesh melting off of your bones
The wine-stained bed of dahlias
Weathered vertebrae and poisoned arteries
Fading in the summer heat

And the light spilling off the windowsill
Crumbling under the weight of stubbornness or inability;
What fears were locked up forever
behind red-rusted vessels sunk and stained burgundy?

Another Weekend in the Mountains

In a patch of rhododendrons
I wonder what is next
With the past
spilling out of my mouth
Petals caressing my lips

I stand at war with myself,
commanding the fleets flanking me
Cannon fire setting off in the night sky
Exploding like fireworks in the front of my skull

Losing sight of who I am
Blacking out from the sense of self that I once held
With my hands buried in
the roots and the dirt

Battling back the troops inside me
Committing arson to my insides
Digging trenches in my veins
Filling my lungs with shovels of ash

Leaves tickle my ear
Hearing silent car alarms
Whatever might be next
I ponder as I fall
Faltering in a patch of rhododendrons

Cyclical Thinking

Shapeshifting horrors shred my brain to shriveled pieces and come crawling out of my ear, dangling from hooked arms on my earlobe, viscera coated on their gaping maws, hungry for the vivisection and desecration of all my closest relationships, tearing apart friendships and family ties with ugly criticisms and twisted thoughts, lying in wait. They oscillate between forms and trace glyphs into the dirt and summon all the rotten things that enter my mind in the night, to rip me into millions of pieces, inch by inch, until I am nothing less than a pile of scraps on the floor, humming with bitter anger and fear of all the horrors plotting their escape from your minds in the twilight hours.

Me Too, Sam

Me too, Sam, me too
Everything you've ever said
I feel it deep in my bones
I feel it so much I want to split my skin open
And set your words free
I want to escape your words
I don't want them to hit home and implode on impact
Reading each word feels like self-immolation
I want to run away and lie in a field on a hill
and trace the words into the dirt with animal bones
The jaw of a fox, the wing of a bird,
Until I can't remember anything anymore
And let the worms wriggle over me and make their lunch

A Second Sam

Sam found god, and it may have saved him, but I still wonder what beauty would have come from his mouth if he kept his lips on the bottle and the pews in his mind on fire. It's hard to let go of a voice that inspired your own so much, that still inspires with its ancient chantings still ringing in your ears. It's not my life to trade, but I still sometimes pray that maybe he'll find his peace without his god and bring his words back to my ears like his god's words fill his ears now.

Please Just Play The Mountain Goats

Please just play The Mountain Goats
I don't wanna think,
I don't wanna feel,
I just want John to sing for me
John, find the beauty in my heartache and this coffee, my toothbrush, and the dust on my bedside table
My roommate's dishes in the sink and everything else I can't seem to place
Tell my friends where I went, as I set sail to Tallahassee on the Sunset Tree and burn down every two-story house on my way there from the racetrack before I head on back to Georgia to pick every last green thing I can find and set it all aside as a meadow of trash
John, I hope you are okay with being the supporting character in this story because this year I really need a new friend to wake me on Saturdays after a night of too much whiskey and longing
John, I hope you are ok, just like I hope everyone is ok, and especially the names I want to forget, and me, I guess
John, take me back to seventeen and beat the names out of me, in the parking lot of my high school
John, please let the wolves and lions loose on me,
Tearing me to pieces, limb from limb, and let it end badly as they dance and feed on me
John, please set me free

Meadows Speak

I see you again and again in my rest
Your eyes are never the same
Your face escapes recollection
But it's you
Always you
Our breath mingles and rises high
And joins the fog of memory
I have questions yet
I have emotions unfinished
I try to speak but the words fall dead on the ground
Your fingers pull them limp from the field underfoot
And send them dancing to the clouds
Without a second thought that they are anything other than another blade of grass
The scenery rolls on
And I'm with you in places we will never be
I cling too tightly and act three fades when I thought we were just expecting a set change
The morning stress washes you away
In the dawn light, I lose grasp
Of the moments exchanged
And push down the longing while I go to make coffee

Bubble Bath
(*published originally with fifth wheel press*)

I blow bubbles from the bath onto your cheek
your laughter echoing off the tiled wall
your fingertips tracing delicate lines across my leg,
your lips pressed against my neck
The bubbles float up and about
and as they burst on the curls of your hair
You burst alongside them
viscera coating the slick walls and my face
the remnants of tendons float in the water
spiraling down the drain
the silence of the moment deafening my ears
and I sigh as I open my eyes and let the shower continue to rinse my skin

Fall Fast

Tripping over my self
-ishly lying in wait
-ing for your next word
-lessly staring at you back
-wards falling into you
-r heart beating against mine
-fields of moments I can never forget
-ting to let out my next breath
-less you leave me
Tripping over my thoughts

Saint-Germain-des-Prés

I flew to Paris
Just to flee my thoughts of you
But was left
Just with thoughts of being with you
In Paris

I Don't Love You

I don't love you
Maybe I could have loved you
I wanted to love you
but I don't love you
I never got the chance to love you
I never had the option to love you
With time I could have loved you
but I don't love you
I'll never know what loving you would have looked like
Never know the sounds of loving you
on a Sunday morning in autumn
Never know waking up on a flight to Germany
to the sensation of loving you sleeping on my shoulder
Never know loving you
by listening to your favorite song on my commute to you
Never know sharing my love for you
with all of those who love you and those who could have learned to love you too
Never know how you feel love deepest
Never know loving you
in the midst of fighting with you
Never know growing to love you
more deeply each passing day
I don't love you
because you chose not to let me
and that's ok

A winter's night's lover

What do I have left, other than this breath
I think as I let it loose into the breeze
As the smoke from your cigarette
Winds its way about me
A ribbon tethering me to the moment with its scent
Your midnight lips part and it's like the splitting of continents
As I wait on the words, cling to every syllable
Flecks of gold in amber pools disappear every other moment
You trace mountains across my chest with your fingertips
And for once, I am home in this body
A fleeting moment clear
Opening me up and pulling my heart out of my ribcage
To let it beat alongside yours
Who else would it belong to anymore?

Peach Fuzz

I once wrote about forgetting the backs of your hands
Like they were a map of my hometown
Yet I drove those streets
And they came to me through a haze
Flowing through my memory
Like the blood through my veins
Part of me I cannot escape
Which I guess means I won't ever truly forget the warmth
In my palm
As our heads collide
Seeking to finally rest our souls on each others shoulders
And what it meant to be seen

I almost forgot you

I spent almost a week without thinking about you
Not your name
The arch of your eyebrow
The way you would end every story like it was a question
The constellation of freckles projected across your cheeks
The lilt in your laugh as you lie next to me
The stories you'd tell of faces I'll never know
I almost forgot you
I only knew
As I went about my day lighter, freer
Yet something was off
Colors seemed to dull
A shade drawn over my eyes
Melodies falling flat on my ringing ears
My coffee bland
As the barista called out your name
Record scratch on my heartbeat
Scanning the crowd to meet your gaze
Knowing full well
You were still asleep on another coast

No Longer You

Maybe somewhere out there
Just beyond the horizon
In another city, in another life
A love, no longer you
Awaits all the beauty I hope to offer
A love hoping to forget someone too
Together we might shed our longing
Leaving behind a peace built on the pieces
We put back together
A new whole from two fractured hearts
And I hope for you
There is a love, no longer me too

In which the thrift store lamp inspires a longing for companionship

The cascading shadows on the wall,
Carry off the thoughts that I am projecting onto them,
Pretending they are leading me back to you.
But who are you anymore?
When “you” has become the longing for a home that is
A handful of different faces
And an ever-shifting target of my desires
And why should you be anything I’ve conjured?
Instead of what I have yet to fall for
Something fresh
Whose depths I can’t even fathom
I thought I’d been searching for “you”
When all I’ve been doing is building billboards towards a dying sun

In Ogham

A poem
for the one
I never felt inspired to write for
Your sweetness like strawberries
Your demeanor delicate like lace
never inspired the longing like others
Why?
The spark of a match was missing to light the flame of my heart to burn recklessly
No tug at my heartstrings to pluck out chords to build the harmony around words of desperation
I want to call it maturity
not passionless hoping for something to exist
where nothing could be built
the foundation just whispers in the wind on the cliffs

Bookstore Thief in the Endtimes

Genet would have hated Barnes and Noble anyway, I say as I go to slip the paperback into my overpriced tote bag with the word "COMRADE" printed on the side. I turn to see the minimum wage worker staring blankly at me, and I await the bouquet of flowers for my heroic act of defiance in the face of this corporation or the knife to my kidney for breaking the law but am only met with an indifference weighed down by pure exhaustion and that weight piles on my shoulders as I let out a sigh.

Outside of Everything

You ask me what it means
And I try to explain that that is like asking what it means to be alive
The words I have tried on barely mean anything to me
I can't possibly make them make sense to you
You say you are just trying to understand me
And I tell you that so am I
You ask what I mean
And I tell you it's like explaining how a flower blooms to a vulture
It's too far outside of everything
You say well you could at least try to explain it
And I reiterate that's all I am ever doing, trying to explain and understand myself
And that only when I am dead, can the full explanation be said to have been stated.

Gender Is A Violence

Gender is a knife thrust between the ribs of Adam and Eve
Twisted like the roots of the fruit-bearing tree
Carving rivers of blood across the landscape of my body
Severing a sense of self it promised
Freud's razor saying he knew me well before I was a surprise my mother could share
Gender is a closed fist pulled back and ready to gut-punch its message
A blow to the head until you internalize in your brain
That it's here to stay
Pummeling itself into you daily without a break, like a fighter on the edge of victory
Gender is a gun taking the lives of so many beautiful faces, too often overrepresented by shades of melanin
A blast to a beating heart demanding it to take a break
The smell of gunpowder spelling an end to names it rejects
The weight of each bullet is like the weight that is carried when the label doesn't "match" what is seen in the iron sights
Gender is a fire raging inside the hearts of bigots as they tell me who I can be and decide which loves are ok
The smoke signals that the home inside is up in flames
The ash where once pride in standing out stood
Gender is a mob mentality of destruction toward moments of beauty
Tearing down monuments to something beyond what it can see
Gnashing teeth at the simple request to be allowed to be me

Crucifixion

I feel the death of god in the slow moments of my days
while children burn halfway across the world
while we argue over what truth is as if it is anything but itself
and divide ourselves by which oligarchs we want to repress us
I feel the death of god in the dying world, or rather the death of a world that will keep us around
while my billion-dollar employer pretends to separate trash from plastic and then mixes it all back together
putting profit before life as the largest healthcare provider in the state
I feel the death of god in my hopeless pleas to build a life built on compassion and creation while bills flood in endlessly, so instead I down IPAs and fall asleep early so I can make it back to work day after day
I feel the death of god on my breath when I speak to strangers, restraining myself from speaking truthfully
fighting back the shouts to accept death with dignity
to dig deeper than the surface
to open your heart to loss and true love
I feel the death of god from dusk til dawn and back around again, every aching present second when I cannot find comfort in all the pain
mine and yours and everyone's suffering spiraling into the void

Fade into the Mist

I fear if I can't learn to love you
I'll never find love
I'll never find peace
Until I can speak my peace to you
I've tried too hard to build myself up
While leaving you beyond the horizon
Well past the setting sun of days and decades dead on your doorstep
Where I refuse to bring my feet back to
To stand in front of you
And see the lines that time has left on your face
A visage I am beginning to replicate
Isolated and lonely
Caught up in my misery
Blaming the same lineage as you
For who I am and the limits of who I can become
Instead of forgiving you for the limits you placed on yourself and set as an example for me
Forgiveness and sympathy seem foreign and out of place
Like carpet on the ceiling
But maybe flipping myself on my head
Will lead toward anything I can begin to believe in

Jeffersonshire

Midnight arrives
And I reawaken as rubber meets pavement
The fading heat of the day bouncing through the humidity
Peddling at a breakneck speed
Snowing in my eardrums
Static in my throat
Streetlights flickering like brand new constellations as I go crashing through the sleeping streets
The crumbling curb is my throne
As I look out over this silent suburban kingdom
My lands, at least for the twilight hours

Bedroom Curtains
(published originally with Instant Noodles Lit Mag)

Waves crashed upon your shore
And you took it in stride
Longing in circles for summers and more
The smell of salt never left the curtains
Blue ink spilled confessions on the walls
Joking off the truth to hold back the waves
Of eyelashes
Thousands of unknown constellations of freckles
And the space between breaths
Words felt different like they might float off and build a new sky
And in it, a sparrow's song

In Distant Suburbs

In distant suburbs, I play with what god has left me. White picket fences and sidewalks bordered with peonies. I burn myself with the desire of the midsummer sun trying to break free of myself and find something in these moments. Dancing down dead-end streets hoping to find what the symptoms of my time in this world mean for the sickness I have inherited with it. The capaciousness of the exposed roots of oak trees fill up with my empty thoughts as I lay in the grass and the sky opens up in front of my naked eyes. I try to focus on what lies beyond, hoping to see the creator that deemed this place of all places to be the place I needed to grow and find myself and what it all means. I find my breath and let it soothe me. The ephemera that I pick up and place down through my days seems fleeting like the sand sifting through my fingertips as I settle myself onto the rocky shores and wonder what else there is to see.

Younger Self

On tree-lined streets, the sun bleaches the blacktop as the heat rises up to my knees. I'm fourteen wrapped in midnight this scalding summer day, barreling down a road towards nothing but the sound as the sounds in my ears blare, trumpets rising and falling as my feet spin circles propelling me forward. My demons awakening in the heat, tearing at my heart to turn it into kindling for the fire that burns to this day. The meat of the organ tears easy as unrequited love has turned it to stone and hammered and chiseled and pounded it to pieces. I unmount, wishing I were less self-conscious so I could let out a scream into the sound instead of the void left deep in my chest.

Wading in the Long Island Sound

Waves break like broken bottles on cobbled shores of rock and sediment, wind carrying the January chill through me as I try to pull the words out of the pits of my stomach, they freeze and sink, clinging to my insides, desperate to stay buried in this husk, fear bubbling up in bile, they escape in a whisper carried off into the graying sky, untethered like I am untethered to myself, lost like my hope, fading like my will to keep going. I chase after them, swimming against the current of the failing daylight up to the clouds, hoping to return them to the depths of my being, hoping not a soul hears them, but they blossom like fireworks against the darkening night and illuminate the world around, broadcast to the eyes of everyone I know, even just tangentially, messaging the thoughts I run from daily.

Spirit Always

A haze clouds your face
Waking in your bed
Hands numb from the cold pouring in the open window
Tear-stained cheeks
Salt connects the freckles like constellations on your face
Dejected and burnt-out
Rejected and scorned
Wrinkled sheets wrapped around
A thinning frame
Scarred with sacred ink
Golden waves cascading on your pillow
A single eyelash flies off from the heat of your breath
Fingers tangled in a fading t-shirt
The sun settling across the shadows on your bedroom wall

Passenger Seat

I should have loved you and that was my mistake
Not that I think it would have lasted
But it would have been better than the nothing I resigned myself to
I think of the lessons I might have learned
The times we could have curated on the rocky beaches and museum hallways
I could be sitting here remembering how your hand felt in mine as you told me mundane little nothings and I stared off into some future that would never come

Some Summers Last Forever

Pulling up to Max's house, an old Victorian two-thirds of the way barreling down the street that descends into the harbor; his father's slightly nasally voice calls out rather sternly for me to help with some chore while Max waits for me, oblivious to my arrival, smashing away at ebony and ivory. Shortly, he comes looking and we race off, weaving in and out of each other's wakes around the corner, bike wheels sending small ripples through the remnants of high tide.

We trade off lines from the YouTube sensation *Just 2 Guyz* knowing our roles perfectly, as we carelessly careen across the county route, drowning out the horns with our harmonized chorus.

Fighting our way through downtown we barely make it, nearly out of breath, to the condo at the top of the hill that overlooks the salt and seafoam of the sound. Teddy can't hear our approach, our calls drowned out by the ever-present bass of Daft Punk. We swim through pulsating rhythms and break him free and fly off rooftops, back down to the world below.

Hoodlums, more innocent than we believe, spreading mild chaos on backstreets before we feast on McChicken sandwiches and Arizona Iced Teas while we loiter in the parking lot of a school none of us will ever attend, thinking of breaking in to see how our neighbors live. We share tales of the last show we each went to, the same one, together, to dance along to the blaring horns of Streetlight Manifesto, and talk about girls none of us have ever spoken to. For ten, twenty miles we weave new stories across the pavement.

As night slowly begins to approach, we make our way to our secret hangout amongst the humming powerlines and sand dunes that seem so strangely out of place. The sun sets the sky ablaze with reds and oranges and blues and everything in between. Sweat on my shins underneath jeans that don't suit the weather, snapping photos of each other and memories that still linger in my veins, images of overgrown grass and weeds, and teenage dreams.